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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0904
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0778
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1354
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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: INTRODUCTORY INTERNEWS VISIT -- "TWO OUT OF THREE AIN'T BAD"

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: On November 28-29, representatives from Internews and USAID met with the Minister of Culture, a group of Mejlis (Parliament) deputies, and Turkmen State University's initial class of future journalists to discuss possible areas for new cooperation. The November 28 meeting with the Minister of Culture and heads of state television stations remained formal, but participants were very interested in receiving more information about Internews. On the other hand, November 29 meetings with the Mejlis and journalism faculties yielded clear next steps that should help separate traditional Turkmen hospitality from a serious desire to cooperate. END SUMMARY.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE FORMAL, BUT CORDIAL

¶3. (U) USAID and its implementing partner for media projects, Internews Network in Central Asia, met November 28 with Minister of Culture and Broadcasting Kakageldi Chayyardurdyev and representatives from state television stations. The Minister praised the close contact and constructive dialogue with the U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan. Participants listened with interest to an overview of USAID's media work and programs implemented by Internews. No specific follow-up was requested by the Ministry at this time. However, the Minister and the head of the international department were aware of the planned USAID-funded Community Connections on media sector development trip scheduled for February 2008 and indicated they planned to nominate participants.

MEJLIS WANTS EXAMPLES OF NEW MEDIA LAWS

¶4. (U) On November 29, the group met with the head of parliament's Committee on Science and Education and a member of the Committee on Intergovernmental and Inter-parliamentary Relations. The Committee head called work to improve mass media "useful" and "needed," and asked technical questions on how Internews' projects to distribute program content to local stations worked. Additionally, he mentioned a newly established governmental commission that will develop new laws governing mass media, including advertising. The deputies expressed an interest in receiving examples of media laws

from a range of other countries and were aware of the Community Connections trip planned for February 2008, in which they indicated a willingness to participate.

FUTURE JOURNALISTS LOOK FOR ROLE MODELS

15. (U) At Turkmen State University, the delegation met the journalism faculty's ten current students and three staff members on November 29. The current faculty was re-established this year, so the six women and four men represented Turkmenistan's entire existing cadre of future journalists. Internews' regional director provided an overview of their activities and established a common bond with the senior staff member when the professor learned that they shared a number of professional acquaintances. USAID's regional media specialist, herself a former U.S. exchange alumna, received special interest from the faculty and students and was asked to "tell the story" of how she arrived at her current position. The senior faculty member expressed considerable interest in distance learning programs for journalists and asked for any possible teaching materials that could be used in the classroom. Following the discussions, the students and faculty alike surrounded the delegation for the opportunity to ask questions and take pictures with the visitors.

16. (U) COMMENT: Overall, this was a good first visit by Internews that demonstrated several possible opportunities to work under its existing USAID agreement in Turkmenistan's still largely closed media sector. Internews will compile examples of media laws from a range of countries for submission to the parliament in the nearest future. Consistent with its existing USAID agreement, it will also offer to conduct a workshop for MPs on "International Standards in Media Legislation," which will serve as an indicator of the seriousness of the parliament's intent to cooperate. For the

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journalism faculty, an initial step toward cooperation will be to provide examples of textbooks that Internews has developed for use in other countries. The possibility of developing a training program for journalists, as suggested by the MFA representative in the hallway after the meeting, is an idea for future consideration, but would require additional funding. END COMMENT.

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